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ABSTRACT

This bulletin deals with current assessment procedures for the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) and discusses changes in CPVE assessment that are currently being considered by Great Britain's Further Education Unit. The first section discusses the reassessments of the CPVE profile's core competence statements and the CPVE preparatory modules that are currently underway. The pilot testing of CPVE optional assessments is also mentioned. The remainder of the bulletin is devoted to assessment in CPVE. The following topics are covered: the purposes of assessment; assessment principles; steps in effective assessment (extending the profile statements, specifying particular attainments or tasks, offering appropriate comments, and describing what a good piece of work would be like); assessment of vocational studies; assessment for progression (making portfolios more revealing and making local progression arrangements); and other Further Education Unit publications on assessments. (MN)

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Changes in CPVE assessment

Changes in CPVE assessment are being considered by the Joint Board in response to several developments.

Profile under review

The profile's core competence statements are being re-examined in the light of interim findings from the National Evaluation of CPVE (see *CPVE 15*) which indicate widespread desire for change. Many respondents to the evaluation have criticised the wording of the statements. They want them to be more closely linked to the core specifications, and the hierarchical levels of attainment represented by the statements to be made clearer. Revisions to the profile are expected to be piloted from September 1988 and introduced nationally a year later.

Pilot core assessment schemes

Optional external assessments in Communications and Numeracy have been available for some time. The CPVE Unit is now piloting core assessment schemes which cover the other eight core areas. Unlike the existing external assessments, these pilot assessments are not written tests or assignments. Instead, they are definitions and descriptions of levels of achievement, together with examples of what could count as evidence and examples of contexts in which the achievements could be displayed. They are intended to be a guide to teachers of how the core competences could be acquired and demonstrated. In the summative documentation, the assessments would take the form of statements in the summary of experience.

The optional external assessments have not found widespread use in CPVE schemes. In 1986/7, only 7% of students were credited with the Communications external assessment, and 10% with the Numeracy external assessment.

Preparatory module profiles

The assessment of the preparatory modules is also being re-examined in the light of the requirements of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (see *CPVE 15*). These specify that assessment procedures must include performance criteria which indicate the standard of performance required.

Assessment in CPVE

Understanding assessment

Assessment is any judgement about what, or how much, a student has learnt. This learning can include not only factual knowledge and understanding, but also both practical and mental skills. Assessment is an integral part of all teaching and learning because both the teacher and student continually make judgements about what has been understood and learnt. Much of this assessment is informal, but some of it will follow formal procedures and be recorded for future reference.

Assessment is needed for several different purposes:

- to identify what the student needs to learn;
- to monitor the student's progress in learning;
- to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching;
- to record the student's final attainment at the end of the course so the student is able to progress to a further course of study or employment.

The first three are usually referred to as formative assessment, and the last one as summative assessment. Formative assessment is intended for the student and the teacher. It needs to be more detailed and specific than summative assessment which is primarily for employers or admission tutors.

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EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT

Specifying clear learning objectives/assessment criteria

Assessment principles

Encourage learning
Assessment should be positive and encouraging, recognising what has been learnt, not labelling the student as a failure for what has not been learnt.

Be informative
The assessment should explain what has been learnt, rather than just give an overall grade or mark which provides very little information for the student or anyone else. Traditional exam certificates, for example, provide virtually no information.

Assess competence
Traditional exams tend to assess the ability to memorise factual knowledge. Instead, the emphasis, both in learning and assessment, needs to be on 'competences': on the capacity to apply knowledge and the ability to perform a job role, not simply to know something about it. It is for this reason that both CPVE and NCVQ express learning outcomes in terms of 'competences'. Assessment should therefore include practical demonstrations, role play and simulations, as well as paper-based tasks.

Involve the students
As part of the learning process, students make continual assessments about what they have and have not understood and learnt, yet they are often excluded from formal assessment procedures. Involving the students improves the quality of the assessment and helps to ensure that progress toward learning objectives is discussed and understood by both student and teacher.

The CPVE profiles, portfolio and summary of experience are attempts to put these principles into effect.

Effective assessment

Assessing student learning is a matter of having a clear idea of the learning objective and then judging how far the student has moved towards that objective. It is therefore essential to specify the learning objectives clearly so that they can be understood by both the teacher and the student.

The CPVE core competences and profile statements can provide a good starting-point for specifying learning objectives. They were designed primarily to be used for summative descriptions of what the student had learnt, and they serve to indicate to an admissions tutor or employer the type of attainment that should be looked for in the student's portfolio. Formative assessment requires the profile statements to be given a more precise, local interpretation.

Ideally, the teacher should be able to present to the student a very clear and unambiguous set of learning objectives. This will direct the learning activities and form the basis of discussions between the student and teacher about how far those objectives are being attained. There are several ways in which precise learning objectives can be specified.

1. Extending the profile statements

The profile statements can be extended to give them a more precise local meaning. Avoid vague or subjective terms. Be as specific as possible. Here are some examples taken from an ILEA project:

Profile statement 41.5 on calculations
'Can carry out calculations with numbers and quantities'

will be interpreted locally to mean:

'Can perform foreign currency conversions, convert decimals to fractions, and carry out multiplications involving decimal points and assign the decimal point to the correct place.'

Profile statement 92.3 on obtaining information
'Can show initiative in seeking and gathering relevant information from a wide variety of sources'

will be interpreted locally to mean:

'Can use reference books such as a dictionary, trade directories and an AA book. Can display initiative in choosing appropriately between different sources of information such as the library, an enquiry office and a questionnaire survey.'

However, general statements, no matter how much they are expanded, will inevitably tend to remain ambiguous, precisely because they are general statements. Learning objectives become more specific the more they refer to specific tasks which represent a particular example of the general objective. This is the basis of the second approach.

2. Specifying particular attainments or tasks

The teacher could present to the class a range of assignments or activities of increasing difficulty and explain the skills and knowledge required for each assignment. This should give the students a clear idea of the learning objectives to work towards. Assessment is then simply a matter of which assignments the students are able to complete. If there are four assignments of increasing levels of difficulty offered during a term, then a student who achieves three assignments has progressed three-quarters of the way towards the learning objectives. This approach can be applied in different ways. For example, instead of giving the whole class a series of assignments of increasing difficulty, the teacher could provide easier and more difficult versions of each assignment every time one was set.

Here is an illustration of how this approach might work in the case of teaching and assessing social skills (preferably as part of integrated assignment work):

The teacher might explain to students at the beginning of the term that the term's work in that lesson would concentrate on the skill of dealing with customers, and it would be developed through role play. A standard reception situation would be used throughout the term, and in each role play the aim would be to send the customer away feeling satisfied. The first assignment would involve dealing with a routine enquiry from a good-tempered customer. The second assignment would be to deal with a customer who had been given some reason to be a little irritated or confused. The third assignment would be to pacify a customer who was absolutely livid and began by insisting on seeing the managing director.

The three situations would involve the same basic skills of dealing with customers, but to different degrees. The measure of the students' social skills by the end of the term would be the level of assignment they had successfully achieved.

It may be difficult at first to specify learning objectives in these ways for the whole year or for a term's work. Here are two approaches to effective assessment for individual assignments. Again, they rely on making learning objectives, the criteria of assessment, explicit.

3. Comments

During a course, the main value of assessment is to guide and monitor student learning (and hence the quality of the teaching). Therefore, among the most important aspects of assessment are the comments and discussion with the students. These are much more important than ascribing general profile statements.

The nature of the comments and discussion must be appropriate. The comments must be supportive, positive and encouraging. However, they must also help the students to see what their specific learning objectives are and what progress they are making towards them. The comments also need to refer to the same, or related, learning objectives from one piece of work to the next. Otherwise, the student will not understand what they are supposed to be learning, and it will not be possible to judge progress.

Poor assessment practice
'Well done. Keep up the good work.'

Good assessment practice

'Well done. This work is much better than your last piece because it is neater and you have made fewer spelling mistakes. Your use of capital letters and full stops is also improving: you only have three such mistakes this time compared with ten in your last piece of work. Try to get all the full stops and captial letters correct in your next assignment.'

Involve the student in the assessment.

The learning objective should be clear enough for students to be able to offer their own judgement of what they have learnt.

'The assignment said we had to show "initiative in obtaining information", and I think I've shown more initiative in ringing up British Rail than in looking at the timetable in the Library because I've got the most up-to-date information.'

An extension of this approach is to describe in advance, rather than retrospectively in the comments, what qualities students should have in their work.

4. Describing what a good piece of work would be like

This approach is to give students a clear idea of the type of work you are seeking from them—in other words, the learning objectives for that assignment. The assignment instructions can contain detailed desciptions of how the assessment will be carried out. For instance:

This assignment will be assessed according to the following criteria:

Obtaining information

Level one	The assignment will contain the information asked for, but it will not be as accurate as Level two.
Level two	The information will be largely correct, i.e. train times correct to within one hour, all names and addresses spelt correctly, and currency conversion correct to within £0.10.
Level three	The information will be completely and exactly correct.

Use of charts and diagrams

Level one	The pie chart showing the cost of the trip will be titled and each part of the pie labelled with ...etc.

If these learning objectives, i.e. these criteria of assessment, appear in assignments throughout the year, it will be possible to see whether students are improving their levels of skill. Of course, the teacher has to try to make the skill levels roughly comparable from one assignment to another.

Assessment of vocational studies

The assessment of vocational modules is exactly the same in principle as the assessment of core competences. Again, the generalised learning objectives represented by the module specifications and by the preparatory module profiles need to be given a concrete and precise interpretation by the teacher, probably by adopting the approaches outlined above.

Assessment for progression

If students are to progress from CPVE to another course or to employment, they need to be able to show admission tutors or employers what skills, knowledge and understanding they have attained. This is the role of the portfolio. If it is to achieve this aim, it must be assembled in such a way as to provide the information which the admission tutor or employer needs.

Making portfolios more revealing

- Include the assignment instructions. If the people reading the portfolio cannot see what the student has been asked to do, they are unable to judge how well the student has done it.
- Explain what information the student was given. ('Using the attached train timetables and the hotel guides in the college library, work out an itinerary ... etc.')
- Describe the circumstances in which the work was carried out. ('To be completed within 10 hours of class time.')
- Include detailed assessment comments, especially comments explaining how much help and guidance the student received from other students or the teacher.
- Make sure the portfolio is well organised and clearly arranged. A contents page and coloured tabs may help readers find the information they are looking for.

Local progression arrangements

Local progression arrangements are agreements between CPVE staff and admission tutors about what attainments students will need to progress to particular courses and what would count as evidence of those attainments. Such agreements can often be extremely valuable for the contact and discussion they generate between CPVE staff and admission tutors. This in itself helps to ensure that CPVE students are sympathetically interviewed by the admission tutor. It will also help the CPVE teachers to ensure that their CPVE course covers the skills and knowledge required for the courses to which students are applying.

In such progression agreements the admission tutors need to give very precise information to the CPVE staff about what skills and knowledge students will need. This can be very difficult to describe in generalised terms. For instance, it is very difficult to describe the level of reading and writing ability required for a course. One way of dealing with this is for admission tutors to supply examples of the type of work students would be asked to do during the first few weeks of the course. The CPVE staff can then incorporate these or similar assignments into the CPVE course. If students include these pieces of work together with detailed assessment comments in their portfolios, the admission tutors can see for themselves how students would be able to cope with the courses for which they are applying.

SOME DOs AND DON'Ts

DO	DON'T
✓ Be generous with praise and encouragement, but set demanding expectations on your students.	X Allow assessment to become simply ticking boxes representing profile statements.
✓ Ensure your students are working towards definite precise learning objectives, not just tackling another piece of work for no apparent reason.	X Use letter and number grades because, unless you link them with an elaborate marking scheme which you explain to your students, the grades will mean little or nothing.

FEU publications on assessment

Profiles in Context is the latest in a series of FEU publications on profiles. Like the earlier publications, *Profiles* (1982) and *Profiles in Action* (1984), it is a collection of papers examining current issues and developments, including the relationship of profiles to records of achievement and graded tests.

Profiles in Context is published by Longman for FEU and can be obtained through booksellers, or from Longman Resources Unit, Freepost, York YO1 7TU (tel 0904 425444).

Further information

In addition to contributing to reports, newsletters and guidance papers, FEU staff also assist with staff development events, review and comment on educational issues relevant to CPVE, and commission research on aspects of pre-vocational education. FEU is represented on the Joint Board and other CPVE national committees.

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